

DOSSIERS.

A KIND OF COLOSSAL ROGUES' GALLERY
IN CONTINENTAL COUNTRIES.

POLICE AND DETECTIVE RECORDS OF PROMINENT PEOPLE THAT ARE A SOURCE OF POWER—THEIR USE FOR TERRORISM AND BLACKMAIL.

In the United States and in Great Britain no man figures in what is popularly known as the "Rogues' Gallery" unless he has been duly convicted of some felony or misdemeanor. In Continental Europe, especially in France, Belgium, Italy, Germany and Russia, there is no person of any degree of social eminence, and of political and professional or administrative prominence, whose record is not on file at the police quarters either of the metropolis of his native land or else at those of the chief city of the province in which his residence is situated. There is hardly any one who is regarded to be of too small importance to thus figure in this species of colossal "Rogues' Gallery." In fact, it is only the laboring classes and the small fry who are fortunate enough to escape this disagreeable form of attention on the part of the police, unless they happen to have been convicted of some offence, no matter how trifling, against the laws of the land.

These police records are known by the name of "dossiers"—a word for which there is no adequate equivalent in the English language, but which has become exceedingly familiar to every one in this country in connection with the Dreyfus case. For the entire controversy on the subject of the prisoner of Devil's Island may be said to depend upon the mysterious contents of the Dreyfus dossier, which alone can determine the question of his guilt or innocence.

The word "dossier" in a general sense means a bundle of documents relating to either one particular subject or individual. But it is more especially used to describe the documentary evidence, good and bad, in connection with a person's record, and on the Continent of Europe a considerable part of the detective force is employed exclusively in securing material for dossiers, the very mention of which is sufficient to cause a cold shudder to pass down one's back. For there are comparatively few in this world whose lives have been so entirely blameless that there is not some episode or other in their existence which they would prefer to keep secret and the publication of which might subject them to criticism, ridicule or disgrace. Even taking it for granted that there are people who are themselves entirely beyond reproach of any kind, they have usually some near relative or intimate friend who has been less circumspect, and to preserve whom from exposure they are ready to make concessions.

SECRETS A SOURCE OF POWER.

The possession of such secrets as these affecting the honor and the prestige of both men and women of position constitutes a source of power and of influence. The Continental Governments of Europe take the ground that it is to the interest of the commonwealth that they should enjoy this power, and accordingly they devote, as stated above, much trouble and money to secure the secrets of prominent people—secrets that go to constitute a dossier. The resources of the detective police are at the disposal of the Government for the purpose, and it will therefore surprise few to learn that wellnigh every public man and woman of any social or political eminence is shadowed by police spies, who not only take note of everything that he or she may do or say, but likewise put the worst interpretation upon matters that are entirely innocent of all harm, frequently inventing incidents and episodes which are entirely devoid of foundation. For it must be borne in mind that the individuals employed for this species of detective work are as a general rule men and women utterly devoid of scruple, the value of whose services is gauged and remunerated by the seeming importance of the information which they furnish concerning their victim. The reports which they make all go to make up the dossier, and from this it will be seen that there are literally none who can hope to have a dossier that is entirely and wholly clean, since a clean dossier would imply not only that the person to whom it related had never said or done a questionable or ridiculous thing in his life, and that his intimate friends and near relatives had been equally discreet, but also that he had refrained from doing anything that could have furnished even the smallest pretext for injurious misinterpretation.

As I have said, every one of any position has both his dossier and to a great extent his shadow, and in the diplomatic service it is notorious that the moment an envoy, a secretary or even an attaché is appointed to any new post in one or another of the capitals of Continental Europe he is shadowed, at any rate for a time, until his habits, his tastes and, above all, his weaknesses are ascertained and placed on record in his dossier for eventual use. Now and then the police spies assigned to this service fail to discover any information, and are either conscientious enough to so report or too devoid of initiative to invent charges against the object of their investigation.

AMBASSADORS BLAMELESS AND GUILTY.

I always remember the case of a foreign Ambassador accredited to the French Government whose dossier was entirely clean, and whom the police authorities ceased after about twelve months to shadow, owing to the detective having invariably reported that His Excellency had not even "des petits vices" (that is, was devoid even of small vices). But in Constantinople, for instance, it was a few years ago notorious that at least two of the foreign Ambassadors were entirely at the mercy of the Sultan, owing to the latter having been placed by his clever police spies in possession of secrets affecting the official and personal honor of their excellencies, the exposure of which would have resulted in their disgrace and ruin. There was likewise until not so very long ago the Ambassador of a great Power at Paris the contents of whose dossier at the Prefecture of Police were such as to place him altogether at the mercy of the French Government and to render him more or less useless to his own sovereign. Even an attaché sometimes possesses information of value to the Power to which his chief is accredited, and may be forced by judicious threats of the disclosure of some one or another of his indiscretions, perhaps affecting the honor of a woman whom he is bound to shield, to betray the confidence reposed in him by his Government. I merely mention this in order to show the interest which foreign Governments have in forming dossiers concerning not only their own countrymen but likewise the strangers within their gates.

The care of the dossiers and their formation are a duty that is entrusted to the Prefect or Chief of Police, who in his turn is responsible to the Minister of the Interior. That is why on the Continent of Europe the portfolio of the Interior Department will in nine cases out of ten be retained by the Premier of a Cabinet. For precisely because the Minister of the Interior has control of all the dossiers, he enjoys the greatest degree of power. In Paris, for instance, the Prefect of Police presents to the Minister of the Interior a daily report of the doings and goings during the previous twenty-four hours, not only of the leading public men, but even of his colleagues in the Administration and of the Chief Magistrate himself. That is the cause of President Casimir-Perier's startlingly sudden and otherwise wholly unaccountable resignation was the fact that M. Dupuy, then, as now, Premier and Minister of the Interior, had obtained by means of his secret agents possession of a secret of the President which concerned not only the latter's future, but likewise the

fair name of another person. Realizing that, under the circumstances, he would be entirely at the mercy of M. Dupuy during the remainder of his Presidency, and in that way probably forced to consent to measures of which he thoroughly disapproved, he preferred to resign. There are several incidents in the career of President Faure, notably during the closing months of his life, that can be explained only by the fact that his Ministers were in possession of some knowledge which they were using in order to terrorize him into compliance with their demands, while if M. Constans, now French Ambassador at Constantinople, has never been impeached in connection with the numerous charges brought against him it is solely because the leading politicians and statesmen in France are afraid to tackle him, well aware that when he was Minister of the Interior he took advantage to secure copies of the dossiers of most of the prominent men in France, who are to-day more or less in his power.

DANIEL WILSON'S CASE.

Probably the most notable case of this kind was that of Daniel Wilson, the son-in-law of President Grévy. As every one knows, he made his home at the Elysée after marrying the President's daughter, and took advantage of the fact to secure in the name of his father-in-law from the Minister of the Interior and from the Prefect of Police official and duly authenticated copies of the dossiers of all the principal public men in France. He prided himself on having in this way secured possession of the complete dossiers of no less than twenty-two thousand men and women of power and of influence. The consequence of this was that when the indiscretions of some of his confederates resulted in the exposure of the shameful traffic which he had been carrying on for several years in connection with the sale of the order of the Legion of Honor he escaped punishment. True, his father-in-law was forced to resign the Presidency of the Republic, General and Senator the Marquis d'Andrieux was sentenced to five years' penal servitude, to avoid which he fled the country, while a number of other men and women, including the infamous Mme. Limouzin, were condemned to various terms of imprisonment. Daniel Wilson alone, the chief culprit, the leader of the entire gang, in spite of his indictment, escaped any kind of punishment, and is to-day a member of the National Legislature, the Mayor of an important provincial town, a counselor-general, and surrounded with all that adulation and regard which the world is accustomed in these days to accord to those who are possessed of great wealth and much power. There has been no secret whatsoever about the cause of the extraordinary immunity enjoyed by Daniel Wilson. In fact, it was openly acknowledged to be due to his possession of the twenty-two thousand dossiers, and his exemption from the legal consequences of the crime for which he was indicted was admitted to have been purchased by his surrender of these documents to the Government.

No better illustration can be given than this of the important role which dossiers play on the Continent of Europe, where by far the larger number of prominent men, from crowned heads downward, live in a perpetual state of terrorism, at the mercy of this or that politician or public servant. This, too, will serve to explain how it is that nearly every prefect of Parisian police who resigns is able to force the Government of the day to confide in him the highest and most lucrative offices. M. Lozé received the post of Ambassador to the Court of Vienna as a condition for his surrender of the chieftainship of Parisian police. M. Andrieux, on ceasing to be Prefect of Police, was appointed Ambassador at Madrid. One of his successors at the Prefecture received a nomination to the lucrative Governor-Generalship of Algeria. Another one has become Senator. In fact, there is not one of them who has not been treated by the Government with most distinguished consideration by reason of the knowledge which he had obtained in compiling and perusing dossiers.

The United States, unlike France, has no regular diplomatic service. Yet it is difficult to conceive the idea of President McKinley appointing the Chief of the New-York police or even the Superintendent of the police of the District of Columbia to the post of Ambassador, either to France or to Great Britain.

DOSSIERS FOR EVERYBODY.

Unfortunately the knowledge comprised in these dossiers is not by any means restricted to the Prefect of Police and to the Minister of the Interior. As shown above by the case of Daniel Wilson, it is within the power of any one possessed of a certain degree of influence to obtain permission to take copies or notes of this or of that dossier without any care being exercised as to whether the information required is for some lawful purpose or with the more ordinary object of terrorism and blackmail. In fact, so great is the readiness of the police to furnish information of this kind, that any bank or house of business employing a bookkeeper or cashier, any firm engaging a manager or salesman, in one word, nearly every employer possessed of any commercial standing, can apply to the Prefecture of Police, if not for the dossier itself, at any rate for what is known as the sommier, that is to say, a précis or list, not merely of the convictions, but even of the charges, often unfounded, that may have been brought, ever since childhood, against the person concerned.

That is to say, if an elderly man who for more than a quarter of a century has lived in every sense of the word a life that can be described as straight and aboveboard has had the misfortune in his youth to be arrested and fined for drunkenness, or to have been even suspected, though not indicted or convicted, of any offence, it is recorded against him, and the record or sommier is at the disposal of his would-be employer; sometimes, too, of a man who is intent on doing him injury. At the Prefecture of Police at Paris there are no less than eight million of these sommiers, all classified with such care that any information required can be obtained in less than five minutes' search. It is not astonishing under the circumstances that during the Paris insurrection of 1871 the very first of the public buildings to be destroyed by the rebels, who were mostly men of questionable antecedents, was the Prefecture of Police, or rather that portion of it which looked upon the Rue du Harlay and in which the dossiers were kept on file. The result is that nearly all the dossiers and sommiers at Paris date from the year 1871, those anterior thereto having been compiled from provincial and foreign records.

Although in the article I have referred chiefly to the terrorism exercised by means of these dossiers in France, yet the same system prevails in other Continental countries. There, however, the abuses in connection with these records are less glaring, owing to the fact that the monarchical system of government insures a greater degree of continuity in the service of the State, and consequently more strictness of discipline than under the rule of a republic, where the terms of office are brief, and there is consequently a disposition on the part of the unscrupulous to make hay while the sun shines. But no matter whether there are abuses or not, the system of dossiers, save in the case of criminals, is an odious one at the best, and under the circumstances it must be a matter of congratulation to all friends of the French nation that the French Senate should at the present moment have under discussion a law proposed by Senator Héran providing for the increased secrecy of police records, and for the exercise of the utmost discretion and severity in communicating to people not connected

with the administration of justice or of police the contents of those bundles of documents known as dossiers. EX-ATTACHE.

SAVINGS BANKS OPPOSE IT.

THE BILL LOOKING TO WIDENING THEIR INVESTMENT FIELD NOT NEEDED.

PRESIDENTS OF PROMINENT INSTITUTIONS IN THIS CITY EXPRESS DECIDED VIEWS REGARDING THE PROPOSED COMMISSION AND ITS OBJECT.

The bill which has been introduced in the Legislature providing for the appointment of a commission to inquire into the expediency of further extending the field of legal investments for savings banks of this State in the municipal bonds of other States does not find favor with the officials of the savings banks in this city. They assert, in fact, that there is no necessity for the wider scope of investment in the direction urged by the measure, and do not hesitate to say that the bill has been drawn in the interest of bond brokers. The purpose of the bill, as it now stands, is to create a commission of five to inquire into and report to the next Legislature what bonds of cities of over ten thousand inhabitants in New-England and the Middle States may be safely admitted as legal investments for New-York savings banks.

Those who are anxious for the passage of the measure maintain that there is imperative need for enlarging the field of investment for savings institutions. With this contention, however, the banks themselves do not agree. J. Hansen Rhoades, president of the Greenwich Savings Bank, and president of the Savings Banks Association of the State of New-York, said to a Tribune reporter yesterday:

"No such measure as this is needed, and we are opposed to it on every point. There is no necessity whatever for the appointment of such a commission as is asked for. We know all about the bonds of the cities referred to. It is useless to create a commission to arrive at facts which are already known. As a matter of fact, we do not want to go into that class of bonds, for the reason that already savings banks are carrying too large a percentage of their assets in municipal bonds. Let me give you some statistics that will demonstrate this. The banks are now carrying 55 per cent of their assets in the bonds of municipalities within the State, to say nothing of the fact that they are carrying about \$50,000,000, or about 7 per cent, in the bonds of cities of other States, making a total of 32 per cent of their entire investments in municipal bonds. In this State, outside of Greater New-York, the savings banks are carrying 35 per cent of their assets in bonds of municipalities within the State, to say nothing of the fact that they are carrying about \$50,000,000, or about 7 per cent, in the bonds of cities of other States, making a total of 32 per cent of their entire investments in municipal bonds. In this State, outside of Greater New-York, the savings banks are carrying 35 per cent of their assets in bonds of municipalities within the State, to say nothing of the fact that they are carrying about \$50,000,000, or about 7 per cent, in the bonds of cities of other States, making a total of 32 per cent of their entire investments in municipal bonds. 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